

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe
NASA Administrator
STS-107 Crew Memorial Ceremony
Arlington National Cemetery
Arlington, Virginia
February 2, 2004

Thank you Fred (Fred Gregory). Today we remember and commemorate the undaunted courage of seven true heroes for our time, and for all times, our Columbia STS-107 astronauts.

This setting, Arlington National Cemetery, is a special place for many reasons. To be certain it honors men and women who have performed extraordinary acts of bravery on the field of battle.

Buried at Arlington are veterans who served the cause of freedom in every conflict from the Revolutionary War to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Arlington National Cemetery also provides a final resting place for great heroes who changed the course of history by blazing new trails of exploration and discovery.

Among those honored at Arlington are such legends of exploration as John Wesley Powell, the first man to explore the Grand Canyon, Admiral Richard Byrd, the first to fly over both poles, and the discoverers of the North Pole, Robert E. Peary and Matthew Hensen.

Resting here at Arlington is also the President who boldly set **our course to the stars, John F. Kennedy.**

From the Kennedy gravesite one can gaze across the river toward our citadels of democracy and recall those stirring last words from his inaugural address, "Whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards **of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you.** With a good **conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our** deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly **be our own."**

The hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery honors many NASA astronauts who took up the President's call to lead our way into the new frontier of space, including members of the **Apollo One, Challenger and Columbia crews.**

Of course, wherever our astronauts are laid to rest is special ground.

Today, the people of a grateful nation add their respects to the seven members of our beloved STS-107 crew here at Arlington National Cemetery.

Through the memorial we dedicate today, visitors to Arlington will learn that these space heroes came from all parts of the United States, and from the lands of India and Israel

They were pilots, engineers and scientists, all motivated by a **fire within, a passionate eternal flame within each of their souls** that compelled them to live lives of distinction, and to bring the heavens ever closer to our grasp.

They bonded as a group while training in the wide-open spaces of Wyoming and came to cherish the view of a globe without borders as they orbited our fragile home in space.

They delighted in working together to advance important **scientific research that will help better all our lives.**

They proved that heroes come in all shapes and sizes.

Fitting memorials also come in all shapes and sizes. Last month President Bush said a living memorial to the Columbia astronauts' legacy will be our new focus and vision for space exploration that will take human explorers back to the moon and then on to other worlds beyond our own.

As the President said, we do not know where the journey begun by all of our intrepid astronauts will end, yet we know that human beings are headed into the cosmos.

Generations from now, when the reach of human civilization is extended throughout the solar system, people will still come to this place to learn about and pay their respects to our heroic Columbia astronauts. They will look at the astronauts' memorial and then they will turn their gaze to the skies, their hearts filled

with gratitude for these seven brave explorers who helped blaze **our trail to the stars.**

I thank every one here with us today, and those watching from afar, for participating in this heartfelt tribute to the heroic Space Shuttle Columbia crew members: Rick Husband, William McCool, Mike Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana (Culp-Na) Chawla (Chav-La), Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon.

May God bless the crew of STS-107